

DIRECTIONS

For bearing the Word preached with Profit.

A N

ORDINATION SERMON.

ADDRESSED to the CONGREGATION
at BISHOP STORTFORD,

On the Settlement of the Rev. W. CHAPLIN, in the
Co-pastorship with the Rev. JOHN ANGUS, A. M.

August 23d, 1797.

By SAMUEL PALMER.

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An ORDINATION SERMON.

MY CHRISTIAN BRETHREN.

YOU have been hearing your minister faithfully exhorted with respect to his duty, and you now expect from me to be reminded of yours. You will allow me, I trust, to use great plainness of speech in mentioning such heads of advice as appear to me most suitable to this occasion, and best adapted to your spiritual profit. That I may not trespass too far on your time, I shall not insist upon your duty at large, either towards your minister or towards each other, but shall confine myself to the right method of hearing the word. This indeed is so comprehensive a subject, that, if it be duly attended to, it will render other advice superfluous. The ground of my address shall be that admonition of our blessed master

LUKE viii. 18.

TAKE HEED THEREFORE HOW YE HEAR.

A gospel ministry is an unspeakable blessing. I congratulate you, my Friends, of this society, that you have so long enjoyed it, and that you have now the pleasing prospect of its continuance. I doubt not but my worthy brother, whom you have so unanimously chosen to assist our venerable father in the ministry, will tread in his

steps, and approve himself a good minister of Jesus Christ. I am persuaded he will preach among you that same gospel which you have been accustomed to hear, with fidelity and acceptance. He will, I doubt not, *take heed to himself and to his doctrine*, as he has now been exhorted to do; and while he is concerned to *save himself*, he will spare no pains that he may be instrumental to the *saving of your souls*.

Considering the situation of many of our societies, and the scarcity of able ministers in the present day, you ought to think yourselves highly favoured, as I doubt not you do. But suffer me to remind you, that every privilege has its correspondent DUTY, and demands an improvement proportioned to its value. Without this it will not only be enjoyed in vain, but will aggravate the guilt of those on whom it is bestowed. With regard to many *the word preached doth not profit*,* nor is it likely it should if it be *not mixed with faith*, and the hearers are not duly concerned to profit by it. The gospel doth not operate as a charm. Though it is the grace of God alone that can give it success, it is addressed to men as reasonable creatures, who are called upon *so to hear* that their *souls may live*. The Apostles as fellow-workers with God, (or rather of God) earnestly besought their hearers that they would *not receive this grace of God in vain*.† With the

* Heb. iv. 2. † 2 Cor. vi. 2.

same

same view let me intreat your serious attention to the solemn exhortation of our blessed Lord which I have just now read.

It is the close of his interesting parable of the sower; wherein he takes notice of the different success of the seed that was sown, though of the same quality and by the same hand, in consequence of a difference in the soil. In explaining the parable, he points out to his hearers a similar difference in the reception and effects of the word preached, according to the different dispositions of the hearers, and the regard which they respectively paid to it. As the improvement of the whole, he subjoins this short and plain, but important and comprehensive advice—*take heed therefore HOW YE HEAR.*

My present design is to offer some plain directions for the most profitable attendance on the preaching of the gospel; which I shall not address to you of this society only, whom I do not suspect to need them more than others; but to all who may be present from other congregations. And I apprehend, from long observation, that there are few of our societies in which there are not some to whom most of the hints I shall offer are applicable.

My 1st direction is—Take heed that you come to hear the word with minds duly PREPARED for the reception of it.

There is a *general* preparation, of unspeakable importance,

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importance, which our Lord in the parable compares to *good ground*; which he explains, ver. 15. of *an honest and good heart*. An heart like Lydia's *opened* to the reception of divine truth: a mind sincerely desirous to know what is truth and duty; disposed at the same time to believe and practise accordingly. A heart destitute of prejudice against the gospel itself, or any of its doctrines, or against them that preach it. Take heed to cultivate such a temper as this.

But I more especially intended here—a *particular* preparation. Before you come to the house of God, think seriously whither you are going, and for what purpose: whose word it is that you are about to attend: the great ends for which it is delivered; and the solemn account you must give long render for every sermon you hear. Such considerations will tend to compose the spirit to seriousness, and render it susceptible of divine impressions.

Endeavour by reading the holy scriptures and devout meditation, to divest your minds of all vain and worldly thoughts. In order to which, not only abstain from all secular business, by which many break in upon the sabbath, but avoid as much as possible conversing about worldly affairs. Getting rid of the *cares of this life*, is plucking up the briars and thorns which *choke the good seed*.

But since the preparation of the heart in man is
from

from the Lord, your wisdom and duty is to seek it of him. Both in the closet and in the family present your fervent supplications to the God of all grace, that he may bring your hearts into a proper frame for the services of his house, that so they may be *prepared according to the preparation of the sanctuary*. And while you are thus addressing the throne of grace, do not forget to offer a petition for your ministers. This will tend to promote that esteem for them which will engage your attention to what they deliver, as well as draw down that divine blessing which is necessary to the success of their labours. Our earnest request to you is—*Brethren, pray for us.*

I must add here; it is of no small moment to a due preparation for receiving the word, to be **EARLY** at the house of God, so as not only to unite in **ALL** the prayers and praises of the church, but to have a few moments for recollection and composing the thoughts before the service begins. The late and indecent manner in which many enter our places of worship, contributes in no small degree to frustrate the design of divine institutions. How pleasant and edifying would it be both to ministers and people, if a whole society could say, at the beginning of the worship—*We all here present before God; *not only to hear his word but to unite in his WORSHIP.*

* Acts x. 33. Every one that made a point of it, could as easily be present before the service begins as the minister. Some, even large families, are never too late.

II. Take heed to hear the word with a serious reverent ATTENTION.

The busines, my friends, on which we assemble here is so solemn, and its consequences so momentous, as to demand not only a grave deportment, as opposed to levity, but also a fix-edness of thought through the whole service. There are many things which tend to prevent both. It is necessary therefore to *keep the heart with all diligence*. In order to which it is of great importance to *make a covenant with the eyes*, and set a strict guard upon the senses, which are the avenues whereby vain and sinful thoughts rush in upon the mind, so as to divert its attention from the great objects which demand it.

Compliments of all kinds, paid to each other after the worship of God is begun, and especially to such as come in late, (who certainly deserve no compliment)—whispering on any topic, or smiling at any little ludicrous occurrence, are indecent and of injurious tendency.

Drowsiness under the word ought to be carefully avoided, and whatever occasions it: particularly such bodily postures, and such previous exertions, or animal indulgences, as promote weariness or sloth. *While men slept the enemy sowed tares.* Preaching to persons whose senses are locked up in sleep, or whose minds are not awake, is like casting good seed by the way-side. We ought to give the most *earnest heed* to the things

things that are spoken, *lest at any time we let them slip.* Heb. ii. 2.

III. Hear the word with CONSTANCY.

There are some who satisfy themselves with hearing a sermon now and then, when it suits their convenience, or rather their humour, or when there is something EXTRAORDINARY either in the preacher or the occasion. As such persons do not propose any good to themselves by hearing, it is not likely that they should receive any; though God may sometimes over-rule a vain curiosity as the occasion of good unexpected and undefired. We should hear, as well as *pray, without ceasing.* It is in a constant regular attendance on divine ordinances that a blessing is to be expected from them. They who are satisfied, when in health and without any real impediment, with one act of social religion, where divine worship is performed twice at least within their reach, and almost at their own doors, discover such indifference to the honour of God, and to their own best interest, that their attendance is not likely to be very beneficial.

And I must be permitted to say—it is not any trifling circumstance relating to FOOD, or DRESS, or COMPANY, or WEATHER, that can be allowed as a sufficient excuse for frequent absence from the house of God. And if people had half that concern for their eternal interests which they have for their temporal, the affairs of fa-

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milies would generally be so contrived that all the members of them, not excepting servants (unless where there are any sick persons or young children) might ordinarily attend two services on the Lord's day.

As to a *third* service, now become common, and *week-day* sermons, every one must be left to his own discretion. Though I fear that the generality who constantly neglect them are not much better employed.

But I must suggest a caution on this head. It is possible you may hear **TOO MANY** sermons as well as too few. It is in hearing the word, which is the food of the mind, as it is in taking our *animal* food. However good in itself, it may be taken to excess. To digest our meat is as necessary as to eat it; and for a man to be eating **all** the day, or feasting every day, would be more injurious to his health than sometimes to go without a meal. Remember that unless you secure time to digest what you hear, the best sermons in the world will do you but little good; on the contrary, like an over abundance of rich dainties, will fill the mind, as they do the body, with pernicious **HUMOURS**. There is too much truth in the saying of a certain witty though four divine:*

“ Some people hear so many sermons that they
“ have not time to practise any.”

Under the head of **CONSTANCY** in hearing,

• Dr. South.

I must

I must recommend a regular attendance on YOUR OWN MINISTERS, when your situation admits.

Christians should not indeed call themselves the disciples of any man : or form so zealous an attachment to any one minister as to refuse hearing any other. This I have known some persons carry to such a length, that if they knew their own minister to be abroad they would stay at home, or if they came and found him out of the pulpit they would leave the place.*

The excellent Archbishop of *Cambray*, in his *Dialogues on Eloquence*, introduces one of his speakers as saying to the other, “ I was charmed with “ my preacher to day : You had a great loss, Sir, “ in not hearing him. O he is a wonderful man ! “ If you did but once hear him you would never “ bear to hear any other.” To which his friend wisely replies : “ If it be so, I am resolved ne-“ ver to hear him. I would not have any one “ preacher give me a distaste for all others. On “ the contrary I should chuse one that will give “ me such a relish and respect for the *Word of God*, as may dispose me to hear it preached “ every where.”

Many hearers in the present day discover the same carnality and glorying in men, that the

* A minister who once preached for Mr. Baxter, observing many of the people going out of the church on seeing a stranger, stopped them by saying “ If you come to hear Mr. Baxter you will be disappointed. But if you come to hear the word of God I am here to preach it

Apostle censures in the Corinthians, among whom one said, *I am of Paul*; another, *I am of Apollos*; and a third, *I am of Cephas*: 1 Cor. iii. 4. as if their respective teachers were so many Masters or Saviours, each having a gospel of his own; and as if their whole salvation depended upon him; whose praise they are constantly celebrating; often to the disparagement of his brethren: from whom they will take pains to draw away their stated hearers to become followers of their own favourite preachers.—This is a foolish and hurtful extreme, which I would caution you against. Respect and love your own ministers, but do not idolize them. *Who is Paul*, (said that man of God to these partial hearers of his) *Who is Paul?* or *who is Apollos?* but ministers by whom, as mere instruments, ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man.

But there is another extreme, on the other hand, which I had more particularly in view, equally foolish and pernicious. I mean that of being equally indifferent to all ministers and all places, and forming no stated connection with any. There are professing christians, (especially in and about the metropolis) who under pretence of great catholicism, decline becoming members of any particular society; or if they do, think themselves under no obligation statedly to associate with it, though most conveniently situated; but if they hear two or three gospel-ser-

mons on the Lord's day, they think it no matter where, or from whom ; but are constantly roving from place to place in quest of NOVELTIES ; running after every new preacher within their reach, who is celebrated as an extraordinary man—no matter *for what*—merely to gratify a vain curiosity : like the *Athenians*, Acts xvii. 21. *who spent their time in hearing or telling some new thing.* Such hearers there were in the early ages of the church, whom the Apostle describes, and severely censures, as *heaping up to themselves teachers, having ITCHING EARS.* 2 Tim. iv. 3.

This perpetual thirst after something new and extraordinary, is not only a great discouragement to the ministers who are thus forsaken, (as the oldest and wisest often are) but it is very injurious to the hearers themselves. It tends to divert their minds from those old and well known truths of the gospel, which must be always the same, and which of all others are the most interesting. It is the frequent source of hurtful errors.* *Though ever learning, they never come to the knowledge of the truth ; at least, for want of hearing*

* " None are more liable to err than they who have a taste for plain sense and sober or *dry* reasoning (as it is called) which is the case of those whose warm imagination, or uncommon vivacity, makes them in love with nothing but what is striking, marvellous, and dazzling. Nothing less than admiration will content them—a temper which draws them off the love of truth, and consequently subjects them to gross mistakes. They will not love truth as such, but " only"

hearing sacred subjects handled in their proper connection, they form no regular connected view of divine truths, and for want of judgment and steadiness, they are seldom very ornamental to a christian profession.* Not to insist upon their loss of sacred time, and the unnecessary fatigue they undergo by travelling to a distance to hear when the *word is nigh them*—it is not any small injury that such inconstant hearers sustain, by frequently losing the benefit of such discourses as their own minister particularly intended for them. How often have most of us been grieved when, after we had been studiously preparing something suited to the circumstances of individuals of our flock, we have found those very persons absent.

III. Hear the word with CANDOUR.

The wisest and best of Ministers, who are *men of like passions* with yourselves, will readily acknowledge their need of candour from their hearers, and we all think we can justly claim it; both in respect to our general conduct, and our public performances. I now refer particularly to the latter. It were unreasonable to expect that these should always perfectly satisfy every hearer, or that they should be really faultless. Besides the infirmities peculiar to Youth

"only when it happens to be surprising and uncommon, which
"few important truths are." *Seed's Sermons*, vol. i. p. 214.

* Read in this connection, *Heb. xiii. 9.*

and

and Age,—Who of us is free from error and imperfection? Many circumstances may happen to prevent our due preparation for the pulpit, or to discompose us in it. Much depends there upon the present frame of the mind, which, as you yourselves know by experience, cannot be always alike. Expect not then too much from your ministers, nor be severe in censuring what may at any time seem to fall short of a reasonable expectation. Consider how arduous our work is. That of a dissenting minister, viewed in all its branches, will easily appear more so than that of any other public speaker whatever. When we think of what is expected from us every week, in the same place, and year after year, and consider the different tastes and tempers of our hearers, we are ready to exclaim with painful anxiety, *Who is sufficient for these things?* The consideration of them loudly bespeaks your candour, and will lead you to make favourable allowances for what may not exactly accord with your taste and judgment, either as to matter or manner. For such candour, brethren, we plead on our own account, as much of our comfort depends upon it. But we recommend it also on YOUR account: your reputation, your pleasure, and your improvement are not a little concerned in it. A nice critical hearer of sermons is no amiable character, and a squeamish appetite in regard to the word preached, like that which respects natural

tural food, is no good symptom either of health or sense. A captious spirit, or a disposition to criticise, will render the most serious, well-intended, and well adapted discourses ineffectual. As it becomes us to *speak the truth*, so you to hear it, *in love*. This will dispose you always to make the best of what you hear, and to improve it, with all its defects, to the best purposes.

True candour will also induce you to allow ministers, whether stated or occasional, without censorious reflections, to use that method of preaching, and that mode of expression and delivery, which they best approve, or which through education or custom is most natural to them, and in which they are most likely to excel. *Every man*, saith the Apostle, *hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner and another after that.* There is almost as great a diversity in the gifts and habits of different ministers, as in their voices or persons, whereby they are respectively suited to different sorts of hearers; and it is a mark of a little mind for any to reproach such as in these respects do not fully gratify themselves.*

If, in any thing of moment, hearers think they have just cause of dissatisfaction with their ministers, true candour, and indeed *equity*, requires that they should wait on them in private, and state their objections; by which means the

* See 1 Cor. vii. 7. xii. 4, &c.

things objected to might either be satisfactorily defended, or in future corrected.

V. Hear the word with MEEKNESS and HUMILITY.

To this purpose the Apostle Peter exhorts : 1 Pet. ii. 2, *wherefore laying aside all malice and guile and hypocrisy and envy and evil speaking, as new-born babes desire the sincere (or unadulterated) milk of the word that ye may grow thereby.* Similar to this is the advice of the Apostle James, Chap. i. 19. — 21, *let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath ; for the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with MEEKNESS the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls.* Those persons act contrary to this apostolic advice, who think so highly of themselves as to hear rather with a view to teach and admonish than to learn ; who are ever listening for something in sentiment or expression to make it the ground of accusation against the preacher, and like those of whom the prophet speaks, Is. xxix. 21, *make a man an offender for a word, and condemn his doctrine on account of an obnoxious phrase.*

Those also act inconsistently with the spirit of meekness and humility, who take offence at the faithful reproofs and admonitions of their ministers. And yet what more common ? Many indeed will bear well enough to hear others re-

proved ; who, when the rebuke comes home to *themselves*, are soon offended and sometimes greatly enraged. See *1 Kings xxii. 8.* When they hear their own characters described, and their own faults censured, they are apt to suspect the preacher of intending to point at *them*, though perhaps he did not know that such persons were present, or was unacquainted with their peculiar failings ; and some in a fit of passion will resolve never to hear him any more. Such conduct is unjust and cruel. If we should *seek to please men*, by suppressing any thing which we think our duty requires us to deliver, we *should not be the servants of Christ.* Would you wish us to incur his displeasure rather than *YOURS* ?

I doubt not your minister, who has this day undertaken the pastoral office among you, has *obtained mercy of the Lord to be found faithful* ; and that therefore he will (as we are all solemnly charged to do,) *rebuke* as well as *exhort*, though *with all long suffering and gentleness.* *2 Tim. iv. 2.* If you have any true regard to him or to yourselves, I beseech you do not discourage him in such faithful dealing. If at any time you feel the rebuke he dispenses come home to your own consciences, instead of being angry with *him*, be angry with *YOURSSELVES.* Meekly receive the admonition, whether intended for you or not, and be thankful for his fidelity, whereby he has done you a much greater kindness than

than if he had flattered you in your vices and follies.

VI. Hear with a particular view to your SPIRITUAL PROFIT.

Many, I fear, come to the house of God without any view at all ; it is custom alone that brings them. Others come only to be entertained ; especially if the preacher have any thing captivating in his composition or delivery. Such hearers there were in the time of the prophet *Ezekiel*, concerning whom the Lord said to him, *Lo thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, or that can play well upon an instrument.* *Ezek. xxxiii. 32.*

Many persons seem to attend sermons on the same principle that they or others frequent STAGE PLAYS, or any other exhibitions of voice or genius : to pass an hour agreeably, and even for their diversion. Sorry I am to say, too many preachers *seem* at least, to intend gratifying this humour, who by a drollery unbecoming the pulpit actually excite as much laughter as is often produced by a well-acted comedy. And the approbation frequently bestowed on such actors of sermons (if they may be so called) is in the language of the theatre. Nothing of this sort, I am persuaded will be found here. Some however may seek to be entertained in another way, and may be satisfied with being so.

But supposing you be ever so highly gratified

by what is agreeable in your minister's sentiments; his compositions, and his delivery—if this be all, what will you be the better? Will the great end of hearing be answered? Or will his object be gained? I am sure he will not be satisfied (as no gospel minister can be) with gaining your admiration and applause though in the highest degree, without promoting the good of your souls. Let this ever be your grand object in hearing. Come hither, not so much to be pleased as to be profited. And remember, THAT is not always the most profitable which is the most *pleasing*. The sweetest medicines are not the best; the bitterest are often the most salutary.

There are some serious persons whose professed object in hearing the word is to receive spiritual profit from it, who greatly fail of the end, or at least often *think* they do, for want of knowing wherein their real profit consists. They place religion too much in the moving of the passions. When this effect is produced, especially so as to draw tears from their eyes, they conclude that their souls are benefitted. Whereas if they have felt no such emotions, they apprehend that they can have got no good by the discourse, and perhaps condemn the preacher or themselves as dead or luke-warm. Such persons are certainly under a grand mistake. The agitation of the passions is as precarious a rule by which to estimate the good effects of a sermon, as the pleasing of the fancy.

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Do you ask—When you may safely conclude that you are truly profited by what you hear ? I answer,—When your judgments are informed with respect to any important point of faith or practice,—When you are convinced of sin and humbled before God on account of it,—When you are comforted under a sense of guilt and depravity by the discoveries and promises of the gospel, and are engaged to *fly for refuge to the hope set before you.*—When you also find the word to be the means of changing your hearts ; of subduing your lusts ; of mortifying you to this world, and engaging you to seek after another and better.

And as to real christians in whom such a saving change is already wrought ; you my friends may assure yourselves that you are substantially profited by the word you hear—when it is instrumental to your *growth in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour*, and is the means of advancing the spiritual and divine life in your souls ; which is best evidenced when you find the fear and love of God promoted in you ; your faith in Christ strengthened ; your love to him and your fellow christians encreased : When you experience any of your corruptions mortified ; any of your graces invigorated, and your souls quickened in any christian duty. In short when you find yourselves more holy, humble, spiritual, devout and heavenly minded. These are the great ends which your ministers aim at

in their preaching, and these you should constantly keep in view in hearing. In order to which I further advise.

VII. Take heed to make a PERSONAL APPLICATION of what you hear.

It is no uncommon thing for people to hear for others rather than for themselves : to consider how well this exhortation and that reproof suited the case of this or that person present, while their own interest in it is forgotten. But remember, your principal concern is with YOURSELVES : And if you neglect to apply what you hear, however excellent, it can do you no more good than any medicine prescribed for you, which however suitable to your case, and how well soever you think of it, you neglect to take. In the progress of a discourse, think with yourselves, in what view the several parts of it, and especially its reproofs and admonitions, suit you in particular, and apply them accordingly.

It is of importance to add, every hearer should endeavour to make the best use he can of those discourses which are not immediately applicable to his own peculiar circumstances.

It is not to be expected, nor is it in the nature of things possible, that every sermon should be entirely adapted to the present situation of every hearer. It would therefore be wrong in any one, for want of this, to go away complaining, as some good people have been known to do—

“ There

“ There was nothing at all to day for ME.” It must be a bad sermon indeed in which there is nothing of general use, and from which no benefit can be derived. As the bee collects honey from every flower, a wise and well-disposed hearer will extract some good from every discourse he hears. He will fix at least upon some one idea, and bring it home to himself ; and if in any view he perceived a deficiency, he will supply it by his own reflections. Some hearers seem to expect the preacher to do every thing for them, without the necessity of any exertions of their own ; whereas they that would profit to the utmost by us, must in the views now mentioned, be preachers to themselves.

VIII. Let every hearer pay a due regard to the characters, circumstances, and tastes of *others* as well as his own ; both with regard to the subjects of discourse, and the manner of handling them.

In this respect some hearers are too selfish, and some worthy persons very inconsiderate. A faithful and wise steward will give to every one of his household his portion in due season. So every christian preacher ought : let every hearer therefore be willing not only to receive his own, but to let others have theirs also.

Both sinners and saints, and the several distinct classes of each, require to be distinctly and largely addressed. The openly immoral must be reproved ;

reproved ; hypocrites, formalists and almost christians must be warned ; and all the ungodly urged to flee from the wrath to come. Let not real christians grudge that time, as lost, which is devoted to the service of those whose situation is so perilous, and whose necessity is so much more pressing than their own. Nor let THESE, on the other hand, scoff or be offended at what is adapted to the inward experience of pious devout souls, in the different stages of the divine life, because they themselves are so unhappy as not to understand it or not to feel interested in it.

And let true believers consider the variety there is in the cases and circumstances of their fellow christians, which demand, at different times, a distinct attention. As there are strong men and fathers, who need strong meat, so there are babes in Christ who require to be fed with milk. As there are some who have been going on towards perfection, there are others (happy indeed is it if there be none among you) who are backsliders in heart. As there are a few who have attained a full assurance of hope, there are many exercised with painful doubts and fears. As there are some walking on the mount of prosperity, almost strangers to sorrow, there are others sunk in the depths of adversity : mourners in Zion, who need strong consolation. Not to mention various other cases, let me recommend it to christians of every description, to consider those of their brethren

brethren, and be willing that they should be attended to as well as themselves.

I might here likewise mention the wide difference which there often is in the members of the same congregation, as to rank and situation in life, as also in regard to mental capacity, education and literary attainments. Though we have but one gospel to preach to high and low, rich and poor, the learned and the illiterate, these all require from us occasionally some distinction in our public addresses, both as to subject and manner. Let not those in the most elevated ranks censure their ministers for *condescending to men of low estate*. It was the peculiar excellence of the gospel, as first propagated, that it was *preached to the poor*, and adapted to them, while the lectures of heathen philosophers were calculated only for men of rank and science. Let such never tempt or wish their ministers to overlook the meanest of their flock. Nor let the poor and illiterate, on the other hand, grudge the attention which is sometimes paid to persons of superior understanding and attainments. An affected display of learning, in the pulpit, is indeed odious, and elaborate metaphysical disquisitions, which the bulk of an audience cannot comprehend, are insufferable. But an occasional criticism, a learned quotation, or a classical allusion, though not universally understood, can hurt no body, any more than a general accuracy of language. In short: with respect

to these, among other particulars, let every one seek to please his neighbour, or consent to have him pleased, for his good to edification, Rom. xv. 2.

IX. Take heed that you pay an impartial attention to the **SEVERAL SUBJECTS** which are treated upon, in their turn and in their proper places.

It is the character of a faithful minister *rightly to divide the word of truth:* There is a vast variety of subjects contained in the books of divine revelation, which all deserve regard at proper times, though not the *same* regard, nor at all times. In respect to these some hearers discover an injudicious partiality, wishing to hear their own favourite topics perpetually handled, to the exclusion of others; and some are not satisfied unless their ministers dwell upon a few common subjects, and that in such a common-place manner, as to intelligent persons must be disgusting.

Not to specify all the different subjects in respect to which this partiality is observable, I will mention only two general ones—**FAITH** and **PRACTICE.**

Some would wish their ministers to be continually insisting on subjects of **MORALITY**, to the neglect of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and are disgusted to hear any thing more than a disciple of *Socrates* or *Seneca* might deliver. This is no proof of that *rationality* which such persons usually claim. It is highly *irrational* in a minister

of Christ to shun declaring the doctrines of Christ, and equally so in them that call themselves christians to be offended at hearing CHRISTIANITY.* But they are equally culpable, on the other hand, who like to hear nothing that does not immediately relate to some doctrine or promise of the gospel, weakly supposing that what is practical cannot be evangelical.

It is true, a minister of Christ, from the very name he bears, and the nature of his commission, may be expected to PREACH CHRIST. But this surely may be done without excluding any of the MORAL DUTIES, which are as essential branches of christianity as any of its doctrines, and therefore not to be ranked among *the weak and beggarly elements*. The LAW must sometimes be preached as well as the gospel; particularly the laws of Christ, and all the important sanctions of both.

To preach Christ, is not to preach him *partially* but *wholly*: to preach every thing which the word of Christ makes known relating to him: His character, his example, his precepts, his threatenings: as well as his divine nature, his mediatorial offices, his labours and sufferings, and all the wonders of his love. That great

* It is a singular fact that many who have acquitted the strongest dislike to evangelical doctrines in the Meeting-house, have gone over to the Church of England, whose forms of worship are full of them.

Apostle who had *determined not to know any thing among his hearers but Jesus Christ and him crucified*, tells the *Colossians*, that he so preached Christ as to *warn every man and teach every man*, Col. i. 28. Take heed that you be ever willing to hear Christ thus preached, as he hath hitherto been, and I am satisfied will still be among you. Carefully consent to have your minister fully *declare the whole counsel of God*. Be willing to hear doctrine and duty, promises and precepts, faith and works, in their connection, and in their season, remembering those important maxims—"there is a time for all things" and "every thing is beautiful in its season."—I must add one more article of advice.

X. Take heed to yourselves AFTER hearing.

Your business is far from being done when the public service is ended: you have more to do at home, and with your own heart. Remember, hearing the gospel is not itself an END, but a means to an end. The great end of all is, to be made wiser and better. In order to this, retire as soon as convenient to recollect what you have been hearing, and to impress the most interesting parts of it upon your memories; which might be done to the best advantage by taking brief hints of the discourse, either in hearing or afterwards. Exercise your judgments about what has been delivered, and compare it with the word of God. We wish you to take nothing

nothing that we deliver upon trust. We commend those who judge for themselves, provided, like the *noble Bereans* they make that divine standard their test: If you perceive our doctrine to be in any thing contrary to the sacred oracles, we charge you to reject it. But while you thus examine our preaching, we charge you also, examine *yourselfes* by it, that you may know wherein you are defective and be engaged to supply what is lacking. Let it be your great concern to remember and apply what you hear in order to reduce it to practice. It is not the most attentive or most judicious *hearer* of the word that is *blessed*, but *the doer* of it. Read to this purpose *James i. 22—25*. And in this connection let me particularly refer you to the words of our Saviour in the context *ver. 21*. *My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it.*

I must add one thing more of peculiar importance to the success of the word preached, which is, let it be followed with fervent *prayer* to that God who alone *giveth the encrease*, and without whose blessing *Paul may plant* and *Apollos water* in vain. If you have **FAMILIES**, talk over, and pray over, what you have been hearing, **WITH THEM**: this, while it tends to impress it upon their minds, will with peculiar advantage fix the impression of it upon your own.

The

The advice which I have given under this last head, supposes, that you retain an old fashioned *Puritanical* practice, which I cannot think some of our modern dissenters have exchanged for a better, viz. that you spend your Lord's day evenings at HOME. This I presume you have been accustomed to do, and this I cannot but earnestly recommend to all who wish their souls prosperity. Promiscuous visiting after the worship of the sabbath, and engaging in that vain conversation which is common on such occasions, is voluntarily exposing the good seed of the word to be *devoured by the fowls of the air*. Whereas following the word preached with serious meditation, close self-examination, and pious converse, is like harrowing in the seed sown, that it may quickly take root. And accompanying all with PRAYER, is the way to bring down those fruitful showers of divine grace, which like *the latter rain*, will cause the good seed forthwith to spring up and yield a large increase.

Many things might be offered by way of MOTIVE, to inforce the general advice in my text. I shall however but briefly mention some of the most obvious.

Consider WHOSE advice it is, which I have been recommending. It is that of Jesus Christ your Lord and Master, who speaks as *one having authority*, and whom in all things the Father requires

quires us to hear. It is that of our Saviour and Redeemer, who by all the wonders of his love has sufficiently shewn his regard to our highest interests. It is the advice of your final Judge, before whose tribunal we must all shortly stand to give an account, among other things, how his gospel has been received by us. He has told us that *the word he speaks, the same shall judge us in the last day.*

Consider WHOSE WORD it is to which this serious attention is required. If it were ours who preach it, we could say but little to urge your regard, and your indifference to it would be pardonable. But remember, Sirs, so far as what we deliver accords with that sacred volume from whence we profess to receive our doctrine, it is the word of the eternal GOD. *He, therefore, that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

Consider further the momentous CONSEQUENCE of a due regard to the truths and precepts of the divine word. We may justly say of them, what Joshua said to the Israelites to inforce his exhortations to that people, *they are your LIFE:* the life of your souls is depending on the reception you give to that gospel which we preach. It is an awful consideration, that if it be not *a favour of life unto life,* it will be *a favour of death unto death.*

Once more, in order to induce you to take heed how ye hear—Consider how soon your opportunities

portunities for hearing will be for ever over. In a little time the lips of the preacher and the ears of the hearer will be closed in death. Human life is so precarious, that any one sermon you attend may prove your last: always hear as if you knew it would. Hear in the immediate view of death, and of that judgment and that eternity which will follow. This single advice, duly attended to, would supersede many others, and would strongly enforce all that I have this day been giving.

If those that sit under the ministry of the gospel did but realize the thought, that they are mortal creatures, who stand every moment on the borders of the grave, that they are hastening to the grand tribunal, and that before the next sabbath arrives their day of probation may be over, and their state fixed for eternity—how differently would our messages be attended to from what they frequently are! They would not trifle with sermons as they often do: they would not criticise nor cavil about things of trivial importance: they would not hear for their entertainment or to gratify a vain curiosity: they would not despise what was serious and practical because it was plain and common, or not expressed or delivered exactly according to their tastes: nor would they take offence at those solemn truths which touched their consciences: nor, when the public service was over, would they

they either forget what they had been hearing or content themselves with giving their opinion about it, either in a way of censure or approbation. But as they would attend the ministry of the word with constancy, so they would hear with seriousness, candour and meekness; with self-application, and impartiality; with an immediate and single view to the good of their souls. When they left the house of God, they would carefully guard against every thing that would tend to drive out from their minds the truths they had been hearing, and to efface the impressions made upon their hearts: they would take pains to treasure them up in their memories, and make it their grand concern to regulate their tempers and lives thereby.

I leave these plain hints to your serious consideration; and conclude with expressing my hearty prayer to God, that your minister, whom with great pleasure I have now seen undertaking the pastoral office among you, may be enabled so to preach, and you so to hear, that the solemnities of this day may be reflected upon by you both, with pleasure and thankfulness, to the latest period of your lives and through the ages of eternity! *Amen!*

T H E E N D.

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